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The Ideal Confederate Soldier

Burwell

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The Ideal Confederate Soldier

ADDRESS BY

Judge Armistead Burwell



Unveiling Confederate Monument

Cornelius, N. C., August 4th, 1910

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My Comrades:---

We have been permitted once more, upon this anniversary, to come to this place of meeting, and to spend, under most delightful circumstances, hours of pleasant social intercourse, exchanging with our neighbors and friends the sweet courtesies of life.

And, thus refreshed and comforted, and accompanied and surrounded by this throng of spectators and participants, whose presence attests the interest they feel, and does to us great honor, we have assembled here that, by fitting ceremony, we may dedicate to its pious purpose this monument, which stands today because of the loving labors of a few devoted members of our little band, and the cheerful contributions of many, whose generosity we would now most cordially acknowledge.

And we have come to formally commit its keeping to the younger generation that is now here, and to the generations to whose keeping they must, in turn, entrust it.

It is most proper that we should thus do.

For it is well that here, upon this spot hallowed to so many within the range of my sight by precious memories, a shaft to the honor of the Confederate soldier shall stand, surmounted by his effigy, in perpetual remembrance of his virtues, displayed as they were, both in war and in peace, and recorded, and told, and sung, as they are, in the history, the literature, the poetry and the music, of this great, this glorious, this now united, nation.

The custom of assembling at this place, upon this anniversary, which has today drawn hither this vast assembly, was inaugurated very many years ago by some survivors of the Confederate Army, to keep alive those feelings of fellowship and affection which had been first kindled, or, at any rate, had been intensified, by the testing intercourse of camp and march and battlefield.

"The 'reunion,' thus established, founded, as it was, upon mutual affection and esteem, and designated to foster good will and neighborly kindness among all who came within the sphere of its influence, has grown in importance and attractiveness from year to year until now, today, the people come with one accord to show themselves, not only neighbors, but friends, one to the other.

But alas! and alas! of the many it was decreed that the places that knew them shall know them no more forever.

Ten comrades stand where one hundred stood on that August day of the long ago, and time has put upon all of the survivors of these survivors the sure prophecy of a swift-coming disappearance.

And yet, there is no tremor in your thinned and thinning ranks—as there was none when, upon the battlefield, death, in its most horrid form, seemed often so surely coming on; and, without bravado, but without fear, you await the inevitable, only caring now for the welfare of the loved ones to whom you must

commit, not only the property which you have earned for them by your labors, but all the honor which lies in having acted well your part, however humble, in the dramas of life—that the names you bear may continue to be synonyms of courage and truthfulness and honesty and honor.

The projectors of this monument, realizing the good effect of this annual assembling of the people of this neighborhood at this place in friendly, social companionship, earnestly desire that the pleasure-giving custom may be continued for many, many years, and that here our children's children, to the remotest generation, may each year meet in delightful intercourse.

These "reunions" of the coming years you and I, my comrades, will not attend.

But in our places will come, we hope, from farm and factory, from town and city, happy throngs of contented and patriotic people, who will thus perpetuate this pleasing custom.

The little boy who today plays about his father's knees, and wonders, perhaps, what all this means, will, at some coming "reunion," be the man upon whom will rest the grave responsibilities of life, and girls and boys yet unborn may in sight of this monument, and beneath the shade of these oaks, spend hours of pure and joyful intercourse.

To these people, young and old, of the future years, your children and your children's children, you would speak by this silent messenger, and, with beseeching modesty, and yet with pardonable pride, bid them heed the lessons to be learned by the cit-

izen in times of peace, and by the soldier in times of war—if horrid war must come—from the record of your lives.

Honored, therefore, as I am, by being selected to speak for you, and to you, today, I feel that I have undertaken to set forth what the "Ideal Confederate Soldier" truly represents.

For this shaft is surmounted by the effigy of no particular officer or soldier, but is intended to stand for that composite ideality, and to remind passing generations of his aims his true purposes, and his wonderful accomplishments.

But, before I begin the enumeration of those virtues which this ideal has represented, and does now represent, I ask your indulgence while, in this presence and at the foot of this monument, I declare that this "Ideal Confederate Soldier" was neither an advocate of human slavery, nor a favorer of the disruption of the Union of the States.

I do not speak of, or for, the Confederate politician or statesman, but for the ideal of those boys and men who, leaving father, mother, sister, wife or children to the care of that God in whom they had been taught to trust, went forth from happy homes beneath this Southern sky to the weariness of bivouac and battlefield, to find rest only in a soldier's grave, or in a home to which desolation had come, but into which despair was not allowed to enter.

By force of circumstances the ideal Confederate soldier was a defender of slavery. He was not its willing advocate.

This statement is most eminently true of the ideal North Carolina Confederate Soldier.

The ideal Confederate soldier was not a favorer of the disruption of the Union of the States. He had been taught to love that Union, but he had been also taught that his first allegiance was due to the State of his nativity and citizenship, and when that State asserted that the Union was practically broken up by the action of the people of the North, and had been then formally dissolved by the legal proceeding of a convention of the people of the State—his people—blood of his blood and bone of his bone—then, and not until then, did he become an enemy of the Union, and a resister of its power.

But what positive human characteristics does this ideal Confederate soldier represent?

Of what, my comrades, shall his silence speak to this younger generation and to the generations yet to come?

We are removed from Appomattox by two score and five fleeting years. The rapid march of events and the good sense and good humor of a great people have borne us a full century from the defeats and disappointments that culminated at that historic spot—that place which marks, not the disappearance of the Confederate soldier, but his entry into a newer and, perhaps, more heroic career. Lee was truly majestic on the battlefield of Gettysburg, but, in the light of subsequent events, may not we say that this hero of a hundred battles—this typical Southerner—this highest type of the American man—was in truth even more majestic as he rode away from the presence of his great and generous foe, to take up burdens of life such as he had never borne, and to assume the hum-

ble, but honorable duties to which he had resolved to devote the remainder of his life, disdaining to tread any federate soldier.

The ideal Confederate soldier was not a favorer of the disruption of path that honor forbade a hero to tread, and refusing to get riches by the bartering of his name and fame.

And as it was of the great Commander, so it also was of his humblest soldier.

The "surrender," as it is called, marked an epoch in his life. It changed, and yet it may be said it did not change, that life. It did not, in essentials, alter his high purpose, or lessen the vigor of those pure motives that had moved him to action.

He had not been, and, even under the stress and strain of the circumstances that surround him, he could not be, a wild-eyed South American revolutionist, bent on "rule or ruin."

He had been a citizen, patriotic, as he thought, armed with gun and sabre and cannon. He became, by easy transition, a patriotic citizen, equipped with hoe and axe and plow.

And with these, it may be, better arms, he waged for this Southland, and for his home and fireside, and for his loved ones, a contest against poverty and want, such as man has seldom waged.

He had turned from the fields of blood and carnage with the painful thought that the God of his fathers had deserted him; but in his new life, about his stricken home and his desolated fields, God's sunshine and God's care were found, and with courage, compared with which the bravery of the battlefield is as naught, he has

been victorious.

And because of his patient and fearless labors in the half-score years that immediately followed the "surrender"—his stand, in time of so called peace, for his race, his people and his land—the South in the fullness of time was ready, other problems having been solved, to take up that work of material advancement in which she is now so successfully engaged.

Therefore let this silent messenger speak for you, my comrades, to the men and women of this time, and to those coming after them, of courage—not only of that spirit which disdains danger, but of that better spirit which stands calm and unmoved as well in defeat as in victory, in darkness as in light, in poverty as in wealth, and impels its possessor under all circumstances, however humble, or however exalted his place may be, to do the full duty of a man.

Let him also speak of patriotism—not the false patriotism in whose name so many crimes have been committed, but that love which exerts itself first in affection for ones neighbors and friends, and then extends itself to other people and other places—of the just enforcement of law and civil order—of honesty and economy in the management of the business of the public—of love of race—his race—for the protection of the purity of the home—for the maintenance of schools and churches—and, with all these, for the preservation of a martial spirit among the people that, if war must come (which God forbid) the men of the great nation.

South then, as in the days when he trod the blood-stained fields of Virginia, may show to the world the endurance, the dashing bravery, the calm courage which he evinced.

And if carping critic shall ask by what authority he shall so speak, history, whether written by friend or foe, will answer, for on her pages are names and events, put there by his prowess and the guarantee of his perpetual fame. There will be found the names of Lee, and Jackson, of Forest and Stuart, of the Hills, and of Longstreet, of Johnson and Polk, of Branch and Pender, and Ramseur—and of many others of glorious memory, to mention whom time fails me. And there, too, will be found the story of Manassas, of Fredericksburg, of Sharpsburg, of Gettysburg and of Chickamauga.

And when you, my comrades, no longer can command him, history will bid him speak of these names, and of these events of which you were a part.

Men and women of this younger time, heed, we beg you, the lessons he would teach.

Be reminded by this silent soldier—who, great as he was in war, was greater in peace—to be brave when danger appears, to bear with fortitude the ills of life, if ills, under God's providence, shall come—to love home and its purity—to protect from taint the Saxon blood that courses in your veins—to be, in fine, men and women worthy of the heritage of fame which this "Ideal Confederate Soldier" won for his Sunny South, and gave to her people, and to the people of all this



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